



Safe Routes to School Guidebook Index

Introduction	1
• What is the Safe Routes to School Program?	2
• Why is Safe Routes to School Important?	3
 The Safe Routes to School Plan	4
• Step One: Identify Interest	4
• Step Two: Organize and Publicize	5
• Step Three: Assess	8
• Step Four: Plan Your Program	12
• Step Five: Implement Your Program	14
• Step Six: Evaluate	15
• Step Seven: Sustain Your Program.....	16
 Appendix	18
• Things To Do If There is a Speeding Problem in Your Neighborhood	18
• Key Indicators of Success for Safe Routes to School Efforts	19
• Starting a Walking School Bus: The Basics	20
 Surveys.....	22
• School Site Audit	22
• Example SRTS Team Invitation	25
• Safe Routes to School Parent Survey	26
• Safe Routes to School Travel Survey	29
• Safe Routes to School Resources	30
 Acknowledgements	33

Introduction

Thirty years ago, more than 66 percent of all children in America walked to school. Today, the number of American children who walk or bike to school has dramatically fallen to a mere 13 percent. Why are the majority of students riding a bus or being transported by car? Student safety concerns and America's increased dependence upon vehicle transportation have led to the significant decline of student walkers and bikers. Recent research indicates that 20-25 percent of morning traffic is a result of parents driving their children to school. The increased traffic has added to existing congestion problems and has created an unsafe walking and biking environment for students.

There are many measurable advantages for students and parents who walk or bike to school. The added physical activity to a student's day will help prevent obesity, promote a healthy lifestyle and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. The increased physical activity elevates the likelihood that children will grow into adults who lead active lifestyles, reducing their risk of health complications due to a sedentary lifestyle. Furthermore, minimizing the number of vehicles in the vicinity of schools will reduce air and noise pollution, and create a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.

You are most likely reading this guidebook because your school environment is unsafe and you want to make a difference in your community. This guidebook will provide your community with a basic outline of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. Reading this guide will quickly convince you of the short- and long-term infrastructure changes and activities that can be implemented in your community to increase student safety. The guide also outlines a step-by-step plan to develop an SRTS program. Please note that the surveys are also available in a printable format online at www.saferouteskentucky.com.



What is the Safe Routes to School program?

The SRTS program is designed to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative; and to facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

The Federal Highway Administration recommends implementing the following five components to ensure a comprehensive SRTS program. They are often referred to as the 5 E's: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement and Evaluation.

- Engineering—creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establishing safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.
- Education—teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools. Lesson plans and activities are available on the website to help teachers promote the SRTS program in their classrooms.
- Enforcement—partnering with local law enforcement agencies to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (including enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crossings, and proper walking and bicycling behaviors), and to initiate community enforcement such as crossing guard programs.
- Encouragement—events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
- Evaluation—monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data both before and after the intervention.



Why is Safe Routes to School Important?

“In Schools and districts across the United States, administrators, teachers and researchers are demonstrating again and again that sound nutrition and adequate physical activity are linked to academic achievement, self-esteem, mental health and school attendance—all leading to stronger student performance” (Taking Action for Healthy Kids: a report on the Healthy Schools Summit and the Action for Healthy Kids Initiative, Action for Healthy Kids, 2003).

- Over the past three decades in the United States, the childhood obesity rate has more than doubled for preschool children aged 2-5 years and adolescents aged 12-19, and it has more than tripled for children aged 6-11 years. The lack of physical activity among children contributes to obesity and health problems.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Many children could achieve or even surpass the recommendation simply by walking, biking or using other active ways to travel to and from school.
- The SRTS program provides greater safety for students. Over the past several decades parental concerns about traffic and strangers have escalated thus resulting in the reduction of a child’s freedom to explore his or her neighborhood without parental supervision. Programs like the “Walking School Bus”—an adult supervised walk to school—identify safe routes to school, and teach safe crossing practices and “street smart” skills.
- The SRTS program reduces the amount of traffic around schools. When more students walk or bicycle to school, traffic volume and congestion decrease during school drop-off and pick-up times, making the trip much more pedestrian-friendly.
- The SRTS program reduces the amount of harmful automobile emissions near participating schools. Fuel emissions contribute to poor air quality, urban smog, acid rain, and global climate change, as well as a range of health problems including bronchitis and asthma.
- The SRTS program enables children to walk and bicycle to and from school in groups accompanied by adults. This gives students a chance to be more physically active, to promote safe pedestrian skills and to learn more about their environment. The program encourages people to change their neighborhoods for the better, working together to make walking and bicycling a safe and enjoyable part of everyone’s life.



The Safe Routes to School Plan

Use the following step-by-step plan to organize your SRTS program. Although it is difficult to predict, one should allow for at least one week to complete each step and a minimum of eight weeks to plan the SRTS program. Each SRTS program is unique and the projected times should be considered estimates.

Step One: Identify Interest

You must determine what the level of interest and commitment is in your community. It will be crucial to recognize and recruit key people who will champion the program. Identify individuals who care about making a difference in the community and who will commit to a long-term effort.

- Speak with school officials about your interest in the SRTS program. Develop a working relationship with the school principal and ask him or her to serve on the SRTS task force. The principal will be able to give you names of potential supporters such as teachers, parents and retired volunteers. You will also want to ask the principal what rules the school has for transporting children to and from school. Some schools may require informed consent forms from parents or guardians stating that the school is not responsible for children until they are on school grounds. Schools may also require signed permission slips before a student leaves the school with anyone other than parents or guardians. It is very important for all stakeholders to become familiar with school policies in order to avoid conflict.
- Contact local officials including mayors, County Judge Executives and local law enforcement personnel to rally support for the program. In the future, these types of individuals might be able to provide funding assistance.
- Talk with parents to identify those who would like to participate. Gathering parents to view other schools' SRTS programs is an excellent way to introduce the concept and get people excited. Regrettably, most parents who drive their children to school will not see a reason to change their behavior.
- Coalition building is an essential part of any effort to bring social or environmental change. Meet with organizations that have an interest in safety, physical fitness or the environment that would be supportive of an SRTS program and might contribute volunteers and materials, or even join your task force.
- Although your program is just in the formative stages, you should start to promote your program. Attend meetings that might have an interest in your goals, such as PTA and teacher staff meetings, public health conferences and school board meetings.



Step Two: Organize and Publicize

During this step you will plan an informal meeting to get people involved in the SRTS program. At this point you have already talked to the school and the community regarding the program. It is now time to prepare for a meeting to provide information to interested persons and to organize the implementation of the program.

- Send a letter to everyone in your school explaining the program and announcing the informal meeting.
- Post fliers throughout the school neighborhoods announcing the meeting and send them home with students. If your school has a website, ask for permission to post the announcement.
- Ask prospective supporters in person, via email or by telephone to attend.
- Place an announcement in your neighborhood newsletter or local paper.

The kick-off meeting will set the tone and enthusiasm for the project. At the first meeting you should:

- Using the SRTS brochure as a guide, explain the purpose of the project. Discuss the school's traffic challenges and the difficulties faced by students who walk or bicycle to school.
- Talk about the growth in traffic, the decline in walking and bicycling among youth as well as the increasing concern for children's health.
- Explain how the program will work and describe the benefits for children, parents, staff and the community. Furnish attendees with copies of this guidebook.
- Show attendees Kentucky's SRTS website and the educational and promotional resources available.
- Provide attendees an opportunity to talk about their safety concerns. Formulate a visible list of problems and solutions for attendees to process.
- Develop a project timeline.
- Determine what the next steps will be and assign responsibilities. If you have a large group, consider formulating subcommittees.





There are three main tasks to accomplish at this organizational meeting. You must identify goals, form an SRTS task force and schedule follow-up meetings.

1. Identify Goals

The first task is to identify your community's particular goals for an SRTS program. For example, are most people interested in a walking program, a biking program, or both? Does the group want an SRTS program for one school, a few schools or the entire community? Do people want safety improved for children who already walk or bike to school? Do the safety concerns involve infrastructure—the condition of sidewalks and intersections—or something like neighborhood crime? Will the focus be simply on finding ways to change the drive-to-school habit?

2. Form an SRTS Task Force

The second task of the informational meeting is to recruit volunteers and discuss the development of your SRTS task force, which will ultimately be responsible for the implementation and development of the program. The task force will lead participants and be responsible for developing ideas and making decisions to move the project forward. The program's success will hinge on a well-crafted task force comprised of individuals from a broad range of backgrounds. Formulate your task force with members who are collaborative, self-motivated and represent the whole community.

The following is a list of potential individuals to include:

- principal or assistant principal
- 3-4 parents
- 1-2 teachers
- Healthcare professionals (school nurse, coordinated school health director, health department representative)



- PTA representative
- School transportation director
- Neighborhood and/or community association members
- Local traffic engineer
- Representative from the local police or sheriff's office
- School crossing guard
- Community traffic safety program representatives
- Local walking or cycling club representatives
- Children who are already walking to school. By listening to their ideas and opinions, the SRTS team can gain valuable insights.

3. Schedule Follow-Up Meetings

The final task to be completed at the informational meeting is to schedule a series of future planning meetings.

Scheduling tips:

- Allow four weeks of lead-time between the day you mail out invitations and your first meeting. You will receive a greater response if you give invitees ample time to plan for childcare or arrangement of schedules.
- Ideally, your team should include 8-10 individuals. Larger groups are difficult to manage and direct.
- Send out the invitations on school letterhead.
- If an invitee is unable to attend the kick-off meeting, extend an invitation to be included in future meetings. Do not perceive an individual's inability to attend the kick-off meeting as his or her unwillingness to participate in the program. Include such individuals on future mailing lists.
- Budget about two hours for this first meeting and make sure everyone signs the attendance list.
- Remember that meetings should be made enjoyable and easy to attend. Have childcare available and provide light refreshments to maintain a relaxed atmosphere.



Step Three: Assess

Gathering information about your community will help you develop an SRTS program that fits your school's needs. You must self-assess your school's surroundings to create a program that addresses the concerns and needs specific to your school. Complete the following four activities as a preparation for your task force to launch the program. Be advised that this step might be more time consuming than one might expect. The surveys are available online at www.saferouteskentucky.com.

1. Provide a walkability/bikeability survey to parents

Distribute the survey to everyone in your neighborhood through the mail or by going door-to-door. Specify a deadline on the survey to ensure that you will receive a timely response. See the appendix for a sample survey.

Results of the survey can be used to:

- Demonstrate a need for an SRTS program.
- Provide information about the barriers to program participation, safety concerns and the locations of families.
- Gain information about how to structure your program to meet the needs of each child and family.
- Information can be used in the evaluation process. Ideally, the survey can be conducted again at the end of each school year to see how many people have changed travel behavior.

2. Obtain a map of the neighborhood and school area

The SRTS team will prepare or obtain a school neighborhood map. There are a number of low- and high-tech ways maps can be prepared. A commercial road map pinned to a board can serve as a base map, with the other information added via markers, highlighters, pins, etc. This type of map may not show enough detail, so you will need to look elsewhere for a map that will give you the detailed information needed. Potential sources for maps include the city planning department, county planning department, USGS (Quad Maps available through www.usgs.gov) and the school master plan. If you can enlist the help of the school board or local government planning agency, you can gather the information and have them prepare a computerized map for you.





The School Neighborhood Map should include:

- The location of the school
- Parent and school bus drop-off zones
- Sidewalks
- Immediately adjoining roads, with their configurations
- Intersections with traffic signals and marked crosswalks
- Intersections staffed with crossing guards
- The surrounding road and path network (the location and names of roads and side paths within a 1-2 mile radius of the school)
- The “walk-zone” or “non-transport” limits near the school where busing is not provided. This information should be available from the school’s transportation director.
- The location of student residences and number of students walking from these locations. This information is very important because it will give the team a sense of where student walking trips originate, and what potential routes they can take to school.
- Make sure your school neighborhood map includes road names, names of landmarks and other helpful information specific to your community.
- Be sure there is a master copy so you can make duplicates in the future.
- Create a legend so your mapping can be easily understood by others.



3. Complete a school site audit to assess the safety of the area and determine possible routes and conditions

Now that you have created your base maps and determined if any roadway improvements are planned near your school, it is time to get out and take a look at existing conditions. The main goal of this exercise is to identify specific locations on the school site and the surrounding streets that need improvements. Take time to watch what happens at the school during the drop-off and pick-up periods. It is very important to examine traffic patterns and student behaviors. Do this several days and informally interview students, teachers and crossing guards about the situation and potential dangers. In most cases, you will already know the major areas of concern such as intersections that are difficult to cross and streets that lack sidewalks. During your walk-through, keep an eye out for sidewalks that need minor repairs, corners that are in need of curb ramps, intersections that are too wide and dangerous, fast moving traffic and other related hazards. Ask students to participate in the survey. They often see safety hazards unnoticed by adults. See appendix for a sample survey.

How to Use a School Site Audit

The school site audit is designed to help you evaluate the walking and bicycling conditions by observing neighborhood intersections, streets and sidewalks used by students. You will want to use your base maps and some of the information collected such as traffic counts and the approximate locations where students live.

At the conclusion of the site audit, gather participants together to summarize the findings and create a list of problems and improvements that are needed. If a local transportation planner is currently not part of the team, this would be a good time to speak to him or her about the problems you have identified.

As you begin to identify where students live and the routes along which they walk or bike, you will learn where to prioritize improvements. In dense city neighborhoods, students may come from every street around the school. In suburban communities, there might be a major street that carries a lot of the student foot/bike traffic. Some communities have designated these main routes as "Safe Routes" and focused on the improvement efforts along them.



4. Use the results of your surveys and audits to develop your SRTS program

Survey results provide guidance and insight on what your SRTS task force needs to address in the short- and long-term. Data pertaining to student travel behavior can be acquired by a simple show of hands survey administered as teachers are taking morning attendance (see appendix for survey). Create a report summarizing the obstacles experienced by children walking and bicycling to school. The information that you have gathered will form the basis for planning your SRTS program. Make the report available to school administrators, public officials, transportation personnel, teachers and parents.



Use the following tips to organize your survey data:

- Use color-coded markings on the map to indicate homes of children who will be participating in the program or going to the school. Also mark safe street crossings, bicycle paths, walkways and dangerous areas.
- Identify potential routes to and from school on the map that are safe and convenient.
- Calculate the number of children who walk or ride a bicycle, school bus, public transportation, automobile or use other means to and from school.
- Develop a participant list that contains the names, telephone numbers, addresses, ages and grade levels of children in the neighborhood who indicated on the survey they would like to participate in the program.
- Contact individuals who responded they would like to help with the SRTS program and ask them specifically how they would like to contribute. Invite them to attend the program planning meeting to learn more about what modifications need to be made and how they can help.
- Speak with teachers who might be interested in having children participate in this process through the SRTS lesson plans.
- Ask your local transportation department to supply traffic counts and ask your police, department of health or local ambulance service for accident statistics.



Step Four: Plan Your Program

1. Hold a Safe Routes to School Planning Meeting

At the planning meeting, present the results of the neighborhood walkability/bikeability survey and the school audit. You will want to define objectives and goals for your program based on the data. Be sure to develop a timeline for your actions. Use the data you have collected through the surveys and informational meeting to develop an action plan for correcting safety concerns and promoting the program in the school. Be aware that you cannot tackle every problem in a short period of time. Identify the issues that need immediate attention and those that should be considered long-term. Consider making small changes immediately, such as adding traffic signs, crossing guards and pavement markings. Long term changes, such as sidewalk projects, may require more time and a significant amount of funding. Work with police to correct enforcement issues. Train crossing guards for dangerous intersections if your school is lacking a safety officer. If snow removal is an issue during winter months, develop a working plan with the public works department to ensure students will be safe. Explore "traffic calming" techniques for situations with chronic speeding. For more information on traffic calming visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/tcalm/index.htm.

Once you have compiled a list of goals and objectives, assign tasks to volunteers. Collect a list of individuals willing to volunteer for tasks and agree on reasonable completion dates.

After the meeting, send participants an organizational chart that includes the tasks, who will complete them and when they will be completed. Also, include contact information for all participants on the chart.

2. Decide what safety precautions must be taken

Some changes can be done fairly quickly such as painting crosswalks because they are less expensive than sidewalks. Costly improvements will require study and may take several years to complete. Be prepared to be persistent until all the safety improvements identified have been corrected.



The following should be considered.

- Consider asking parents to wear a badge or tag identifying them as an SRTS adult leader.
- Plan what to do if a child must stay after school or misses the group to walk home. Adult leaders should be instructed never to leave school with a child unless the parent has provided the school with instructions to do so.
- Adult leaders should learn pedestrian safety rules so they can demonstrate safe behaviors to students and be aware of potential dangers when walking. Adult leaders must understand that they are setting an example for children and should model appropriate safety habits.
- Before you start you may want to remind neighborhood residents that the SRTS program is soon to begin. Ask them to take particular caution as they drive during the morning and afternoon hours when children will be walking or biking to and from school.

3. Organize participants' schedules

Use the information from the parent survey to find out when parents want to lead a walk to school. You may want to suggest that these volunteers meet separately to work out schedules and develop a calendar. The following issues should be considered during this process:

- Where should children wait for pickup? (At the end of their driveway, in the lobby of their apartment building, at a designated bus stop, or another location, etc.)
- Where will the children meet at the end of the school day for the walk home?
- What will you do during severe weather situations? Some may choose to continue to operate if it is lightly raining or snowing, but on days when the weather becomes hazardous, you should reconsider walking.
- How long will the group wait for a participant before continuing the walk or bike to school?
- What is inappropriate behavior and what are the consequences?



4. Send out parental consent forms

If you have not already, check with the principal to find out specific rules on parental consent policies. Your neighborhood may also want parents to sign a written consent that informs parents about the program and any potential risks. Parents who sign the form are simply giving permission for their children to participate in the program.

5. Conduct a practice walk or bike to and from school



Children, parents and adult leaders should do a practice walk to and from school. You may decide to schedule the practice walk on a weekend or evening so all parents and children can participate. The practice will help to determine how long it takes the group to get to and from school, identify any problems that might occur, allow you to correct problems prior to the kick-off day, enable parents to show their children what behaviors they expect each day during the walk and provide an opportunity for participants to meet each other.

Step Five: Implement Your Program

Implementing your program involves holding a kick-off event. When your SRTS program is completely planned, kick-off your implementation with some high-profile events. A kick-off event is a great way to get people excited about the SRTS program. Some suggestions for an event include:

- Inviting local officials, law enforcement officers and celebrities to participate in the event and walk or bicycle to school with a group of students.
- Providing healthy breakfast items and juice at the meeting spot for the event as well as incentives, such as t-shirts and bicycle helmets.
- Sending out a press release, inviting members of the media to be present at the kick-off, and preparing a story on your SRTS program. Positive coverage may encourage others to begin programs in other neighborhoods or schools.
- Plan your kick-off event in conjunction with the International Walk-to-School week held annually the first week of October.



Step Six: Evaluate

At the end of each semester or time period decided by the SRTS task force, evaluate your program.

- Ask students, teachers, parents, school administrators and other groups involved what they think can be done better. Collect the success stories and publish them in a newsletter to send to your partnering organizations. Consider constructing an annual or semi-annual SRTS report to be distributed to stakeholders.
- Fill out the SRTS evaluation form. Use this evaluation to see how your program is working and how to improve it.

As you are monitoring the progress of your program be sure to address participants' concerns and revise objectives and strategies as necessary. This is important because it confirms the program is meeting its goals and objectives, it helps to identify successes and problems and it will generate additional support for the program.

The task force needs to know what is working well and what needs improvement. The program cannot grow without this information. Members of the task force must chat with parents, teachers and administrators and request constructive criticism. Parents rapidly lose interest in programs that do not meet their needs, but they may not be candid in their feedback without being asked.

It is useful to document the successes of your program. If you already have, or if you plan to seek funding from outside sources or from your own municipal budget, potential funders will want evidence that you are making a difference. Are a greater number of children getting an increased amount of exercise? Is there less traffic near the school in the morning and dismissal times? Has there been a reduction in accidents or near misses?



Step Seven: Sustain Your Program

After the program is underway, it will be necessary to keep morale high and motivate participants, especially during the winter months. To keep individuals excited about the program, include daily activities or weekly and monthly contests in your SRTS plan. You can also distribute informational letters about the program at parent-teacher conferences or ask the editor of your child's school newsletter to include a section about the program. Visit our website at www.saferouteskentucky.com to access resources to help sustain your SRTS program.

- Plan for the next school year's program, as children will be graduating elementary or middle school. New parent organizers and leaders will be needed.
- When a new school term begins, create a feeling of excitement among the walkers or bikers by planning a special outing or doing something exciting on the first day back to school.

Look for ways to expand your SRTS program.

Promote the success of the program to other neighborhoods, the school and to the community. Here are some ways to accomplish this goal:

- Promote the program by word of mouth
- Include articles in your school newsletter
- Post your own newsletter or e-newsletter at school
- Present your program at the next PTA meeting
- Ask a local news station to do a story
- Write an editorial for your local paper promoting the program



Some Final Tips for Success

Congratulations! You are on your way to starting a program that can make a positive impact on the safety and physical health of your children and help strengthen your community. In addition to this guide there are many resources listed in the appendix that will help you construct and maintain your program. Take the best of the ideas that are presented here and use your own creativity to develop a program that works best for your school. Here are some final tips—have fun!

- Involve potential stakeholders and get them to buy into the program. Stakeholders include parents, teachers, law enforcement agencies, community groups, local school health councils and roadway departments. Be sure to include students. The program is for them and their enthusiasm and participation will help breed success.
- Elect a team captain who is focused and has the motivation and perseverance to keep the program moving and the other task force members motivated.
- Stick to the schedule and stand by your goals and refer back to them.
- Be efficient during your SRTS meetings. Shorter meetings are often more productive than long meetings.
- Make your meetings open to the public. Advertise them along with other school functions to let the larger community attend. Have a spot on the agenda to allow for those not on the SRTS team to comment, and be receptive and responsive to those comments.
- Accomplishing your set goals will likely not come easily. Remember that persistence, tenacity and patience will be required.
- Finally, celebrate successes along the way and recognize those who have invested their time and effort in the program. This is also an important aspect of an SRTS program. It will foster a sense of community for the team and provide encouragement and incentive to stay the course.



Things to do if there is a speeding problem in your neighborhood

- Talk to your neighbors and community leaders to find if there is actually a problem. If others support your concerns, a solution is most likely to be found.
- Ask your local police department to monitor speeds in the area. In addition to ticketing speeders, many police departments own speed display trailers. Ask if the trailers can be placed along the streets you have identified as having the speeding problem.
- Let drivers in the area know that speeding is not acceptable. Include messages in community and school newsletters, and on signs throughout the neighborhood.
- Ask your county or city to redesign your street to slow motorists through construction of traffic calming devices. Motorists commonly speed on streets that are straight and wide. Traffic calming devices can slow motorists' speeds through the construction of road treatments, which include raised devices (such as speed humps and raised crosswalks), roadway narrowing, curves in the roadway or trees planted along the street.



Key Indicators of Success for Safe Routes to School Efforts

Outcome	Measure Before and After	Direction of Change
Behavior of Children	Number of children walking to and from school	More
	Number of children bicycling to and from school	Better
	Skills for walking and bicycle safety	More
Behavior of Drivers	Number of vehicles arriving and departing school at drop-off and pick-up times	Fewer
	Speed of vehicles in and around school area	Slower
	Aggressive driving behavior	Less
	Number of driving trips by parents and length of morning and evening commute	Less
Community Facilities	Quality of walking environment: number and usefulness of sidewalks and bike lanes	Better
	Safety oriented intersections	More
Crashes and Injuries	Number of traffic crashes involving children walking or biking to and from school	Lower
	Severity of injuries	Less severe
	Number of conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians/bicyclists which would be likely to lead to crashes (i.e. near misses)	Lower
Community buy-in	Number of different types of people involved in the SRTS effort	More
	Level of commitment and energy displayed by the SRTS task force	Higher
	Parent enthusiasm about SRTS and allowing their children to walk and bike to school	Higher
Environmental Quality	Level of air and noise pollution in school area	Lower
	Land devoted to parking and drop-off/pick-up areas	Less



Starting a Walking School Bus: The Basics

What is a walking school bus?

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to and from school, or as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers.

A variation of the walking school bus is the bicycle train, in which adults supervise children riding bikes to school. The flexibility of the walking school bus makes it appealing to communities of all sizes with varying needs.

Parents often cite safety issues as one of the primary reasons they are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school. Providing adult supervision may help reduce those worries for families who live within walking or bicycling distance to school.

Why Develop a Walking School Bus?

Studies show that fewer children are walking and biking to school, and more children are at risk of becoming overweight. Changing behaviors of children and parents requires creative solutions that are safe and fun.

Start Simple

When beginning a walking school bus, remember that the program can always grow. It often makes sense to start with a small bus. Pick a single neighborhood that has a group of parents and children who are interested. It's like a carpool—without a car—with the added benefits of exercise and visits with friends and neighbors. For an informal bus:

1. Invite families who live nearby to walk.
2. Pick a route and take a test walk.
3. Decide how often the group will walk together.
4. Have fun!

When picking a route, answer these questions:

1. Do you have room to walk?
2. Are there sidewalks and paths?
3. Is it easy to cross the street?
4. Do drivers behave well?
5. Does the environment feel safe?

Reaching More Children

Success with a simple walking school bus or a desire to be more inclusive may inspire a community to build a more structured program. This may include more routes, more days of walking and more children. Such programs require coordination, volunteers and potential attention to other issues, such as safety training and liability. The school principal and administration, law enforcement and other community leaders will likely be involved.





First, determine the amount of interest in a walking school bus program. Contact potential participants and partners: parents and children, law enforcement officers, principals and school officials, and other community leaders.



Second, identify routes.

The amount of interest will determine the number of walking routes. Walk the routes without children first.



Third, identify a sufficient number of adults to supervise walkers.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends one adult for every six children. If children are ages 10 or older, fewer adults will be needed. If children are ages 4 to 6, one adult per three



Next, finalize the logistics.

- Who will participate?
- How often will the walking school bus operate? Will the bus operate once a week or every day?
- When do children meet the bus? It is important to allow enough time for the slower pace of children, but also to ensure that everyone arrives at school on time.
- Where will the bus meet children—at each child's home or a few meeting spots?
- Will the bus operate after school?
- What training do volunteers need?
- What safety training do children need?



Finally, kick-off the program.

A good time to begin is during International Walk to School Week held annually in October. Invite city and school officials to participate in walks.

For more information on how to organize a walking school bus program, visit:

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center

- <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>

PANA Walking School Bus Guide

- <http://www.panaonline.org/programs/khz/actionkits/wsb/index.php>

California Walk to School

- http://www.cawalktoschool.com/files/2005/walking_school_bus.pdf

Go For Green

- http://www.goforgreen.ca/asrts/pdf/How2_WSB.pdf

Active and Safe Routes to School

- <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/index.php?page=walkingschoolbus>



Safe Routes To School School Site Audit

The following audit should be conducted to help determine walking and biking conditions on or adjacent to school property. This audit will help the school to discover potential areas for design improvements and increased safety. Members of the School Traffic Safety Team and the Principal should complete the audit during prime school hours in order to see how students get to and from school. Please take a map of the school grounds with you on the audit for orientation and note taking.

Date: _____ **Time:** _____ **Weather Conditions:** _____

1. Student Drop-Off Areas

	YES	NO	NA
a. Are they designed so that students exiting or entering cars are protected from other vehicles?			
b. Do they have a continuous raised curb separating vehicles from pedestrians?			
c. Are there curb ramps for wheelchair access?			
d. Do the ramps have tactile warning strips or textured concrete?			
e. Are there posted vehicular signs?			
f. Are there posted pedestrian signs?			
g. Is the area lighted?			
h. Does traffic seem to move freely without congestion and backup?			
i. Please describe additional problems within the student drop-off area in the space provided below.			

2. Bus loading zones

	YES	NO	NA
a. Are bus driveways physically separated from pedestrian and bicycle routes by raised curbs or bollards?			
b. Are bus driveways physically separated from parent pick-up and drop-off areas?			
c. If the buses are "double-stacked" in loading areas, are safety measures taken for students needing to cross in front of or behind a bus?			
d. Is traffic in the bus loading zone one-way?			



	YES	NO	NA
e. Does the bus zone meet the minimum width for drop-off/pull-out lanes?			
f. Is there a continuous curb and sidewalk adjacent to the drop-off/loading area into the school site?			
g. Is the bus loading/unloading zone lighted?			
h. Please describe additional problem areas regarding the bus loading zone in the space provided below.			

3. Sidewalks and Bicycle Routes	YES	NO	NA
a. Are current pedestrian and bicycle routes separated from motor vehicles by the use of sidewalks and separated paths?			
b. Are the bicycle routes designated by signage?			
c. Are marked bicycle lanes present?			
d. Are sidewalks and bicycle paths regularly maintained?			
e. Are there ramps for wheelchair access?			
f. Are the sidewalks continuous and without gaps?			
g. Do the ramps have tactile warning strips or textured concrete?			
h. Are the sidewalks lighted?			
i. Are the sidewalks used regularly?			
j. Please describe additional problem areas regarding the school's sidewalk system and existing bicycle routes in the space provided below.			

4. Adjacent Intersections (intersections near school property)	YES	NO	NA
a. Are there high volumes of automobile traffic?			
b. Are there high volumes of pedestrian traffic?			
c. Are there painted crosswalks for all crossing intersections?			
d. Are there curb ramps located at all adjacent intersections?			
e. Is there appropriate vehicle signage?			
f. Is there traffic control, such as stoplights or stop signs?			
g. Are there pedestrian walk signals?			
h. Please describe additional problem areas regarding these intersections in the space provided below.			



5. Sight Distance (clear views between motorists and pedestrians)	YES	NO	NA
a. Are desirable sight distances (visibility free of obstructions) provided at all intersections within the walking zone?			
b. Do parked vehicles block the vision of other motorists, bicyclists or pedestrians?			
c. Have the placement of fences, walls, dumpsters and the location of parking areas been carefully considered in view of sight distance requirements?			
d. Please describe additional problem areas that have sight distance obstructions in the space provided below.			

6. Traffic signs, speed control, signals and pavement markings.	YES	NO	NA
a. Are there school crossing signs, school speed limit signs, flashing beacons, and No Parking and No Standing signs?			
b. Is there an effective school traffic enforcement program?			
c. Is there a designated school zone?			
d. Are there any school pavement markings located on roadways adjacent to or in the vicinity of the school grounds?			
e. Are there currently traffic control measures used, such as different pavement surfaces, non-white paint, speed bumps and speed tables?			
f. Please describe additional information regarding adjacent traffic signs, speed control, signals and pavement markings in the space provided below.			



Example SRTS Team Invitation

(On School Letterhead)

DATE:

TO:

RE: Southside Elementary School's Safe Routes to School Program
Program Team Formation

Dear _____:

You are invited to join an exciting new program here at Southside Elementary—the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. The purpose of the SRTS team is to ensure that safer walking and bicycling routes to school are provided for our children, as well as to provide safety and educational training. Through this program, it is our desire to increase the number of sidewalks and bike lanes to improve our children's safety. Furthermore, we intend to expand the school's curriculum to include safety and education programs that will teach pedestrian and bicycling behavior and safety techniques.

We have scheduled an SRTS team kick-off meeting on (DATE), at (TIME). The meeting will be held at (PLACE). Refreshments and childcare will be available, and we look forward to seeing you there! Please RSVP to (PHONE #), so I can plan accordingly. Thank you in advance for your help with this important matter.

Sincerely,

NAME AND ADDRESS

Cc: Principal
School Board



Safe Routes to School Parent Survey

How Walkable or Bikeable is Your Community?

(Your School)

Dear Parents,

As a member of our school community, you may have heard about our development of a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program. This program will enable us to identify ideas for both educational (student, parent and community education, etc.) and physical improvements (sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic signals, etc.), in order to provide safer walking and bicycling conditions for our students. It is vital that we receive as much feedback as possible so that we can have a clear view of the improvements needed in order to make our community safe. The purpose of this survey is to get your input on these matters. In order for the school traffic safety team to compile accurate results, we are asking for as many parents as possible to fill out the survey and return it or mail it to the school.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns about this program and survey. My phone number is (XXX-XXX-XXXX). Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your Name

1. Please provide the gender, age and grade of each of your children attending our school.

2. In your opinion, do you live within walking distance of school?

3. About how far do you live from school? *Circle one.*

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. ½ mile or less | c. Between 1 mile and 1 ½ miles |
| b. ½ mile to 1 mile | d. Over 1 ½ miles |

4. How do your children get to school? *Circle one.*

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| a. School bus | e. Bike |
| b. Car | f. City bus |
| c. Carpool | g. Other (please list) _____ |
| d. Walk | |

5. If your children walk or bike to school, please list the primary streets they use to get to and from school.

List streets: _____



6. How do you feel about the following statements pertaining to the walking and biking conditions in your neighborhood? *(Check one box per each question).*

	SA Strongly Agree	MA Mildly Agree	N No Opinion	MD Mildly Disagree	SD Strongly Disagree
a. There are too many high-speed vehicles.					
b. There are high amounts of vehicle traffic.					
c. There are broken sidewalks.					
d. There are gaps in the sidewalk network.					
e. There is poor lighting.					
f. There is a crime problem.					
g. There are not enough crosswalks.					
h. There are not enough crossing guards.					
i. It is dangerous to walk or bike to our school via sidewalks and roads.					
j. I feel comfortable allowing my children to walk or bike to school.					

7. Which of the following statements would influence your decision to consider letting your oldest child walk or bike to school?

	YES	NO	Maybe
a. If they were accompanied by an adult.			
b. If they were accompanied by other children the same age.			
c. If they were accompanied by an older child.			
d. If new sidewalks and crossings were installed.			
e. If police patrols and crossing guards were along school routes.			
f. If they received walking/bicycling safety education from the school.			
g. If we lived closer to the school.			



8. How important are the following factors in influencing your decision to allow your children to walk or bicycle to school?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
a. Crossing guards at all busy intersections.			
b. Continuous sidewalks from your house to the school.			
c. Clearly marked walking and bicycling routes (with signs).			
d. Separated trails connecting your neighborhood to the school.			
e. Slower traffic in the neighborhood.			
f. Better lighting.			
g. Emergency call boxes and designated safe houses.			
h. Secure places to park bicycles.			
i. School education programs on walking and biking safety.			

9. Traffic safety education programs are a primary component of the SRTS program. Below is a list of potential programs that could be developed at your school. Please check the ones that you would like to learn more about.

- ☐ a. The Walking School Bus (walking to/from school with an adult supervising a group of children)
- ☐ b. Contacting parents and updating them on the program
- ☐ c. "Safety Post" program, where parents or other adults volunteers remain present at various locations during AM and PM travel times
- ☐ d. Providing a "safe house" for children who may need assistance
- ☐ e. Help organize the October walk to school week event
- ☐ f. Not interested in helping at this time, but would like updates
- ☐ g. Other, please list ideas below. Attach additional pages for your response as needed.

10. Please list below the nearest street intersection next to your home.

Please provide your name, telephone number and email address if you would like to be contacted about the volunteer opportunity you checked above. To remain anonymous, please leave this section blank.

Name _____ **Telephone** _____ **Email** _____

Please return this survey to _____



Safe Routes to School Travel Survey

Dear (School Name Here) Teachers,

We need your help to make our community a safer place to walk and bike to school. This is a travel survey that will assist our Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Project Team in evaluating the current walking and biking conditions in our school community. When you receive this survey, please take a few minutes to ask your homeroom students the following questions and record the appropriate responses. Please return the completed survey to the school office today. This information will help us determine how the students are currently getting to school in the morning to enable us to plan for safer routes.

Thank you for your help!

(name here)

Teacher Name _____ **Grade** _____ **Total Number of students** _____

	Number of Students
1. How many students walked to school today, raise your hand:	
2. How may students rode a bicycle to school today, raise your hand:	
3. How many students rode a scooter or skateboard to school today, raise your hand:	
4. How many students came in a car, truck or SUV today, raise your hand:	
5. How many students came in a school bus today, raise your hand:	
6. How many students came to school today in a city bus, raise your hand:	

Safe Routes to School Resources

www.safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/index.htm

The Federal Highway Administration's official SRTS website.

www.walktoschool.org

The official website of International Walk to School Day. They provide all of the materials necessary to participate in this event. The website also includes many ideas to encourage students to walk to school throughout the year.

www.goforgreen.ca

Go for Green is a national non-profit, charitable organization encouraging Canadians to pursue healthy, outdoor physical activities while being good environmental citizens. The organization promoted the Active & Safe Routes to School program and the International Walk to School Day in October.

www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk

Sustrans, a sustainable transport charity, works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle, and use public transportation in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. Their goal is to create a safe route to school for every child in the United Kingdom.

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website with information regarding Kidswalk-to-School. This is a community-based program that aims to increase opportunities for daily physical activity by encouraging children to walk to and from school in groups accompanied by adults.

www.saferoutestoschools.org

The Marin County (California) Safe Routes to School program has proven to be a leader in the SRTS movement in the United States. Their website contains many valuable resources including a toolkit, lesson plans and forms.

www.bikewalk.org/safe_routes_to_school/SRTS_introduction.htm

The National Center for Bicycling and Walking is the major program of the Bicycle Federation of America, Inc. It is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to creating bicycle-friendly and walkable communities.

www.dhs.ca.gov/epic/SRTS

California's SRTS website. California's goal is to get more children traveling safely to school on foot or bike, with greater frequency. Their website contains a wealth of resources and links.

www.trans.ci.portland.or.us/SafeRoutes/program/program.htm

The city of Portland, Oregon, recently began an SRTS movement. Their website contains helpful educational resources for teachers, parents and students.



www.saferoutesinfo.org

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center provides one or two day training for school attempting to establish SRTS programs. You can find excellent resource material on their website including nationally recognized walkability and bikeability surveys.

www.saferoutestoschool.ca

Active & Safe Routes to School promotes the use of active and efficient transportation for the daily trip to school, addressing health and traffic safety issues while taking action on air pollution and climate change. Their website provides resources, tools, information and links for schools and communities to create their own unique Active & Safe Routes to School program.

www.bicyclealliance.org/saferoutes/index.php

The Bicycle Alliance of Washington's goal is to successfully train as many schools as possible across the state in order to plan and implement SRTS programs. This website provides information about existing SRTS programs, information on starting your own program, and links to existing programs and other relevant information.

www.walkboston.org

WalkBoston is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to improving walking conditions in the cities across Massachusetts. Their mission is to create and preserve safe walking environments that build vital communities. They promote walking for transportation, health and recreation through education and advocacy. WalkBoston's website contains an SRTS toolkit and lesson plans.



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

- *Safe Routes to School: Practice and Promise, 2004*

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, UNC Highway Safety Research Center

- www.walktoschool.org
- www.saferoutesinfo.org

State of Maryland

- *Maryland Safe Routes to School Guidebook: A Guide for Parents and Communities*

U.S. Department of Transportation, NHSTA

- *Safe Routes to School Overview, 2000*

Walk Boston

- *How to Start Your Own Walk-to-School-Bike-to-School Traffic Reduction and Safety Program, August 2003*

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